



Albuquerque	Denver	Salt Lake City	St. Louis	Las Vegas
1-888-272-8870	1-800-451-5246	1-866-872-7212	1-800-554-2222	(702) 436-6335
(505) 247-1769	(303) 755-4756	(801) 265-0444	(314) 367-3343	

TERMS TO KNOW

Terms related to child welfare and the adoption process

Adoption services: Any activity/procedure designed to facilitate the entire legal process of adoption including intake, pre-placement activities and planning, adoptive placement of the child, post-placement activities, and post-legalization (or post-finalization) services.

Adoption subsidy: Financial or medical assistance given on a one-time or on-going basis to an adoptive parent on behalf of an adopted child. This subsidy may be provided through federal, state, county and/or local resources. (See *Title IV-E*.)

Adoption exchange: Organizations designed to help facilitate adoptive placements by sharing information about children for whom an adoptive family is needed. Exchanges also provide advocacy, training, information and referrals for adoption agencies and adoptive families. Information about potential adoptive families may also be shared.

Birth parents: Also called biological parents. This is the preferred term for the parents who gave birth to a child. *Real* or *natural* parents are not considered positive adoption terms.

Closed adoption: An adoption in which identifying information about the birth parents and adoptive parents is considered confidential and is not made available. Records containing this confidential information are usually sealed as a result of state law and/or court order.

Designated adoption: The birth family selects a specific family to adopt their child, either directly or with the aid of a liaison or adoption facilitator. In some states, birth parent counseling is required and the adopting family must complete an adoption family assessment.

Disruption: When a child placed for adoption is removed from the prospective adoptive home and returned to foster care before the adoption is finalized. Reasons for disruptions vary but are generally the result of some incompatibility between the child and the family. In most cases, the child is eventually placed with another adoptive family. The family who could not keep that child may consider other children.

Family Assessment: Also referred to as *home study* or *adoption study*. The process of educating prospective adoptive families about adoption, ensuring that their home would be a safe and appropriate place for a child, and determining what kind of child would best fit into that family. Family assessments are usually done by licensed social workers affiliated with a public or private adoption agency. Independent social workers, adoption attorneys and other adoption facilitators may also do family assessments. An assessment is required before a child can be placed for adoption.

Finalization: The action taken by the court to legally make an adopted child a member of his/her adoptive family. Finalization of infants usually takes place about six months after the child is placed in the adoptive home. Finalization of children from foster care generally takes place one year after the child moved into the home.

Foster-Adopt: A placement where the child is placed into the home as a foster child with the intention that, if the child cannot return home and parental rights are terminated by the courts, the foster family will adopt the child.

Foster parents: People licensed by the state to provide a temporary home for children who cannot safely live with their birth parents.

Guardian Ad-Litem: (GAL) A person appointed by the court to represent a child in all court hearings that concern him/her. A child's GAL is usually an attorney.

Group home: A large foster home licensed to provide care for several children (perhaps up to 10). Some group homes function as family homes with parents who are always available; others have staff members who work at different times along with the group home parents.

Hold: Term used to let families who are inquiring about children waiting to be adopted know that the child's agency is not interested in receiving inquiries about the child at this time. Reasons for the "Hold" vary. The term is also used in reference to prospective families who may be listed with an adoption exchange.

Home study: (See *Family Assessment*.)

ICPC - Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children: This is an agreement between states to coordinate the placement of children for adoption across state lines. The compact guarantees that each state's adoption laws and procedures are met and the child's placement is properly managed and finalized.

Independent adoption: An adoption that takes place without the involvement of established public or private agencies. May also be called a *private adoption* and is generally facilitated by an attorney.

Legal risk placement: The placement of a child into a prospective adoptive home before the termination of parental rights of the child's birth parents. The termination of parental rights may be under appeal by some member of the child's family, or the courts may wish to wait until an adoptive family has been identified before terminating parental rights. In a legal risk placement, the agency having custody of the child is usually more certain that the child will not return home than they are in a foster/adoptive placement.

Life book: A collection of pictures, stories, drawings etc. that tell about the life of a child. This book is particularly important for children in foster care who have moved from place to place and have lost significant people in their everyday lives. A child's life book is an excellent therapeutic tool in addition to being a treasured keepsake.

Open adoption: An adoption where there is some interaction between the birth family, adoptive family and the adopted child. Generally the adoptive family and the birth family agree to a level and style of communication that is comfortable for both parties and in the best interests of the child. Communication may be by phone, correspondence or personal contacts. In a **semi-open adoption**, contact may be maintained through an intermediary, usually the adoption agency.

Orientation meeting: An initial group meeting for prospective adoptive parents where information about the agency's procedures and policies are explained and questions about adoption may be answered.

Placement: A child may have had numerous out-of-home placements after a social services agency has determined that a child is not safe in his current home. The agency may place a child with relatives, in emergency shelters, foster homes, group homes, residential treatment centers or psychiatric hospitals. Also used to refer to the day when a child moves into an adoptive home.

Plans: Term used when an adoptive family has been selected for a waiting child. In most cases, the family is getting to know more about the child, but the child has not yet moved into the adoptive home. May also be used in reference to prospective adoptive families who are seriously considering a specific child for adoption. Some agencies and exchanges use “Hold” rather than “Plans”.

Post-legal adoption services: Services provided by an adoption agency to the adopted person, the adoptive parents and/or birth parents after an adoption has been legally finalized. These services may include counseling, support groups, and respite care.

Post-placement: The period of time between when a child moves into the adoptive family home and the finalization of adoption. A variety of post-placement activities may be offered by an adoption agency to an adoptive family, such as counseling, referrals, support and visits by a social worker.

Purchase of service: A contract between two agencies whereby the agency having custody of the child pays the agency working on behalf of the adoptive family for recruitment, placement and post-placement services.

RCCF - Residential child care facility: A place that provides care for more than 10 children. May also be referred to as a residential treatment center where housing, meals, schooling, medical care and recreation are provided. Therapists, counselors and teachers are trained to meet the needs of children with emotional and behavior problems.

Receiving home: A licensed foster home that is prepared to take children immediately after they have been removed from their birth home. Receiving homes keep children for a short period of time, generally no more than 90 days. If a child cannot return home, he/she will be moved to a regular or specialized foster home that is prepared to meet the child’s needs.

Relinquishment: The voluntary act of transferring legal rights to the care, custody and control of a child and to any benefits which, by law, would flow to or from the child, such as inheritance, to another family. An adoption agency or lawyer must work with the court system to make a relinquishment legal. (See *Termination of Parental Rights*.)

Respite care: The assumption of daily caregiving responsibilities on a temporary basis. Usually designed as a 24 hour a-day option to provide parents or other caregivers temporary relief from the responsibilities of caring for a child.

Special needs: (See *Waiting child*.)

Subsidy: (See *Adoption subsidy*.)

Termination of Parental Rights (TPR): Legal action taken by a judge to terminate the parent-child relationship. This action ends the rights of a parent to the care, custody and control of a child and to any benefits which, by law, would flow to or from the child, such as inheritance. When the parental rights of both birth parents have been legally relinquished or terminated the child is considered legally free for adoption.

Therapeutic foster home: May also be called a *treatment foster home*. A foster home where the parents have special training to deal with children with significant emotional and behavior problems.

Title IV-E: The Title IV-E Adoption Assistance Program is a federal program that provides assistance to families adopting qualifying children from foster care. Money through this program is distributed to adoptive families by each state.

Waiting child: Term used to identify a child, usually in the foster care system, who is waiting for adoption. These children generally are of school age, members of a sibling group, children of color, and have physical, mental/cognitive, and emotional problems that may be genetic or the result of experiences of abuse and neglect.

Terms related to children's special needs

ADD/ADHD - Attention Deficit Disorder/ Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder:

A common diagnosis for children who demonstrate marked degrees of inattentiveness, impulsivity and, in some cases, hyperactivity. A medical diagnosis is given to children who exhibit symptoms before the age of seven and medication or behavior modification programs are frequently prescribed. Typical behaviors include: a short attention span, high distractibility, acting before thinking about the results, constant interrupting, engaging in risky or dangerous behavior. Children with the hyperactive component are squirmy and fidgety, talk excessively and have difficulty participating in quiet activities.

Blind: Used to describe a person with total loss of vision. Persons with partial vision may be described as partially sighted, visually impaired, or persons with partial vision.

Cerebral Palsy: A group of conditions resulting from brain damage before, during or shortly after birth. The most obvious symptom is an inability to coordinate or control muscles in one or more parts of their bodies. There is a wide range in the level of disability. In more serious cases, mental retardation, convulsive disorders and problems with thinking, vision and hearing may occur.

Congenital disability: A disability that has existed since birth. *Birth defect* is no longer considered an appropriate term.

Deaf: Used to describe a person with total loss of hearing. Persons with partial hearing may be described as hearing impaired, having a hearing impairment or having a partial hearing loss.

Developmental disability: A chronic mental/cognitive and/or physical impairment incurred before the age of 22 that is likely to continue indefinitely. The disability may substantially impact independent functioning and may require life-long support. The term includes people with mental retardation, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, and sensory impairments. These impairments may have been present from birth or may have resulted from a traumatic accident.

Although this is the federal definition, some states or other organizations serving people with developmental disabilities may use a broader or narrower definition to include those they are able to serve.

Disability: A temporary or permanent condition that interferes with a person's ability to function independently - walk, talk, see, hear, learn. It may refer to a physical, mental or sensory condition. Terms no longer considered acceptable when talking about people with disabilities include: *disabled, handicapped, crippled,*

deformed or invalid. Acceptable descriptions include: a person with a disability; a boy who is visually impaired; a girl who has a hearing loss; a child who uses a wheelchair.

Down syndrome: A person with Down syndrome is born with an extra chromosome. This causes mild to moderate mental retardation, slanted eyes, short stature and poor muscle tone. Respiratory infections and congenital heart disease are common and generally treatable.

EBD - Emotional/Behavioral Disorder: Children with emotional and behavior problems are often placed in special EBD classrooms at school where they receive individual attention and a teaching style and structure that accommodates their challenges.

Emotionally disturbed: Term used to describe a person with behaviors that are outside the norm of acceptability. A child may be emotionally disturbed as a result of a traumatic or stressful event in his/her life. The emotional disturbance may be temporary or chronic; it may be organic or purely functional. A high percentage of children available for adoption are considered to be emotionally disturbed to some degree as a result of abuse, neglect, and removal from their family.

Fetal alcohol syndrome, fetal alcohol effect: (FAS/FAE) Children whose mothers (and possibly fathers) drank heavily during pregnancy may suffer debilitating physical and mental effects, such as retardation, developmental disabilities, and learning difficulties. Children with fewer resulting disabilities are said to have fetal alcohol effect rather than the syndrome. Early intervention may reduce the severity of a child's learning difficulties, but the effects of the damage done never can be erased.

Hydrocephaly: A medical condition caused by an excess of fluid in the brain. A child with this condition usually has had surgery to insert a shunt that drains the fluid away from the brain. The shunt doesn't usually limit a child's activities but does require medical attention.

IEP - Individualized Education Plan: IEPs are the result of an educational assessment that determines that a child has significant learning challenges. Such a plan is made for children who are having difficulty learning in school, whether due to learning disabilities, developmental disabilities or emotional and behavior problems. Learning and behavioral goals and objectives with specific measurable outcomes are identified.

IPCD - Identified Perceptual or Communicative Disorder: Term used to identify a special education classroom for children with these difficulties.

Mentally ill/ mental disorder: Term used to describe a person whose thought processes and/or behaviors do not fit the norm. Many mental illnesses are attributed to a chemical imbalance in the brain and can be effectively treated with medication or psychological counseling. Some mental illnesses seem to run in families. A mental illness is not the same as mental retardation, though intellectual functioning may be negatively affected by the behaviors associated with the mental illness.

Mental retardation: A level of intellectual functioning that is below average. A person with mental retardation generally has an IQ below 70. Also referred to as cognitive impairment.

Microcephaly: A condition where a person's skull is smaller than normal and remains so throughout life.

PTSD – Post-traumatic stress disorder: A set of behaviors resulting from experiencing or witnessing an event or series of events which were most likely of a violent or abusive nature and traumatic for the child. Children who have been removed from their homes, have lost significant people in their lives, and lived in multiple foster homes also may have this disorder. Some of the characteristics include flashbacks, persistent thoughts and

dreams related to the event/s, and dissociation. Therapy has proven to be an effective tool in helping children recover from traumatic experiences.

Reactive attachment disorder: An emotional and behavioral disorder marked by a child's inability to establish a healthy parent-child relationship of trust and reciprocal exchange of affection. This is most often a result of repeated separations from a primary caretaker and disruptions in the cycle of the child's feelings of need and having those needs satisfied before the age of five. Children with reactive attachment disorder may fail to initiate or respond appropriately to most social interactions, or they may be indiscriminate in their interactions - overly friendly with people they don't know. A great deal of material on this subject, as well as parent support groups, is available for adoptive families of children with this disorder.

Seizure: An involuntary muscle contraction which is a symptom of epilepsy or a brain disorder. A convulsion refers to seizures that involve contractions throughout the entire body. Many seizure disorders can be controlled with medication. The term "epileptic" is no longer considered acceptable.

SLIC - Significantly limited intellectual capacity: Used to describe a special education classroom for children with low intellectual ability who are not mentally retarded.

Spastic: Describes a muscle with sudden, abnormal involuntary spasms. People with cerebral palsy often have spastic muscles. It should be used to describe a muscle rather than a person.

Special needs: Term used to identify the needs of a child waiting for adoption. Nearly all children in foster care are considered to have special needs due to their age, ethnic heritage, need to be placed with siblings, and physical, mental/cognitive, and emotional problems that may be genetic, the result of abuse and neglect, or the result of the instability of foster care.

Specified Learning Disability: (SLD) A child with SLD is unable to learn effectively in a normal educational environment due to difficulties related to the learning process. It does not refer to people with visual, hearing or emotional disabilities, nor to those who are economically, culturally or environmentally disadvantaged.

Speech impairment: Difficulty producing readily understandable speech or understanding spoken language. A person with a speech impairment may have limited speech or irregular speech patterns.

Spina bifida: A defect in the closure of the canal that encloses the spinal cord. This can cause a variety of disabilities that may include problems with bowel and bladder control, paralysis of the legs, hydrocephalus (enlarged head due to excessive fluid in the brain) which may produce mild to moderate mental retardation.